

SFY 2025-26 OHIO PROBLEM GAMBLING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT AND PLAN

Presented to the Ohio Casino Control Commission

Pursuant to Sec. 5119.47 of Amended HB 59, 130th GA by the Ohio
Department of Behavioral Health



**Department of
Behavioral Health**

**Casino Control
Commission**

**Ohio for
Responsible
Gambling**

Letter From the Director

Dear Esteemed Members of the Ohio Casino Control Commission,



It is my honor to share the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health's Problem Gambling SFY2025 annual report, detailing the state's comprehensive approach to address problem gambling.

This report, compiled by DBH's Office of Community and Family Resiliency, offers an in-depth look at the continuum of care from prevention to recovery designed to support communities, individuals, and families affected by gambling-related harm.

Beyond clinical services, the report underscores the vital role of public awareness, workforce development, and integrated service delivery in building a responsive, person-centered system of care. It also highlights those collaborative efforts of Ohio for Responsible Gambling partners (ORG), including the Ohio Casino Control Commission, the Ohio Lottery Commission, and the Ohio State Racing Commission whose shared commitment strengthens the reach and impact of these initiatives.

As we reflect on the progress made and celebrate key milestones achieved, both statewide and locally, this report affirms Ohio's position as a national leader in problem gambling prevention, treatment, and recovery. Looking ahead, it sets a clear vision for advancing our collective efforts, ensuring every Ohioan has access to the support they need when they need it most.

Sincerely,
Tia Marcel Moretti, LSW, OCPC
Interim Director
Ohio Department of Behavioral Health

Problem Gambling in Ohio

Every five years since 2012, the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health, in partnership with Ohio for Responsible Gambling (ORG), has distributed the Ohio Gambling Survey, which is designed to gather information about how adults are gambling: how often they are gambling, what characteristics they have, and what characteristics may relate to gambling behaviors. This survey was completed most recently in 2022. It found an estimated 254,000 Ohioans are afflicted with gambling disorder, and 1.8 million Ohioans are at some risk of gambling disorder.

DBH and its ORG partners use results of the survey, in part, to guide our decision-making regarding the populations, programs, and services highlighted in this annual report.



The Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network

The Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network (OGTN) was created to provide counseling and therapy services statewide to individuals affected by gambling-related harm who lack local access to qualified treatment providers or face barriers to care. The program, currently administered by PGNO, ensures all Ohio residents, regardless of ability to pay, can receive no-cost telehealth services from clinicians trained specifically in gambling disorder treatment.

In SFY25, OGTN served **55 unique clients** through **64 intakes, 48 assessments, and 610 individual counseling sessions**, including **112 sessions conducted outside standard business hours** to increase accessibility. Clients came from **27 counties** across Ohio, with a **75% completion rate** from intake to assessment. The client age range was 21 to 78, **averaging 45.4 years old**, with **males representing 69% of clients and females 31%**.

OGTN's mission is to support those affected by gambling by providing counseling services, sharing information about local resources, and helping clients address gambling-related harms to improve overall well-being through accessible, flexible telehealth care.

Pause Before You Play, Change the Game Ohio, Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network Campaigns

The Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network (OGTN) launched its new service and website in June 2024, followed by a paid media campaign starting in July 2024. The campaign included digital, streaming TV, and earned media during major awareness months and high-volume viewership events, such as the Olympics, Suicide Prevention, National

Recovery, Responsible Gaming Education, and Problem Gambling Awareness Month. This multi-channel strategy generated **over 21 million digital impressions, nearly 59,000 website visits, 300 paid search conversions, and earned media reaching over 71 million potential viewers**.

The "Pause Before You Play" campaign introduced a new PSA video, "Ice Bath," targeting male sports enthusiasts ages 18-34 through cable, streaming TV, digital media, and in-bar advertising. This campaign extended into sponsorships with college sports teams at Miami University, Kent State University, and the Ohio State University, collectively reaching millions through in-stadium signage, broadcasts, and digital ads. Additionally, in-venue advertising targeted veterans during November, and sports fans during March Madness with **over 8.6 million impressions**.

The "Pause Before You Play" influencer campaign featured virtual interviews and content shared on social platforms, generating engagement around the risks of sports betting. A new partnership launched in June 2025 with the Toledo Mud Hens and Zepf Center has begun on-site activations reaching thousands of attendees.

ORG was a key sponsor of the January 2025 Ohio Problem Gambling Conference, promoting the "More Than A Bet" campaign, which focuses on protecting college athletes from sports betting harassment. ORG also presented at the Indiana Council on Problem Gambling's Emerging Adults Summit in April, educating attendees about gambling's mental health impacts on youth and athletes.

"Change the Game Ohio" (CTGO) expanded its outreach through responsible gifting campaigns during the holidays, social media influencer partnerships targeting parents, and sponsorships of the Ohio High School Athletic Association



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championships, reaching over 3.9 million impressions combined. CTGO also sponsored the Ohio PTA Convention to directly educate parents and educators about youth gambling risks.

Research conducted through surveys and focus groups informed CTGO’s evolving messaging, highlighting normalization of gambling by family members as a key concern. In addition, podcast advertising during Mental Health Awareness Month generated more than 650,000 impressions to Ohio’s teaching and parenting audiences.

Ohio for Responsible Gambling (ORG) partnered with Origo Branding to create and continuously update two major statewide campaigns: the adult-focused “Pause Before You Play” (PBYP) and the youth-targeted “Change the Game Ohio” (CTGO). These campaigns provide education about

responsible gambling, prevention of problem gambling, and available state resources. They utilize a broad mix of media, including digital, cable and streaming TV, radio, print, environmental ads, in-venue advertising, sports sponsorships, social media, influencer posts, podcasting, and earned media.

The campaigns showed significant reach and engagement in SFY25, with the PBYP campaign generating **more than 78 million impressions across various platforms** and the CTGO campaign achieving **more than 25 million impressions alongside a 40% increase in website traffic compared to the previous year**. Earned media efforts expanded their audience reach further to **nearly 42 million people**. Overall, these efforts maintain above-average engagement metrics reinforcing their effectiveness in advancing responsible gambling awareness and education throughout Ohio.

Key Metrics (SFY25 and Cumulative)

Metric	SFY25	Cumulative Total
Estimated Campaign Impressions	103,058,663	747,080,415
Online Quizzes Completed	959	71,328
Community Toolkit Visits	1,629	17,947
Website Visits	152,871	966,928
Page Views	196,290	11,681,952
Digital and Social Media Impressions	43,329,304	128,125,859

Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) Partnership

A significant new partnership was established this year with the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). Through this collaboration, the State leveraged its youth gambling prevention initiatives, including the Ohio for Responsible Gambling (ORG) campaign’s “Change the Game Ohio” and “Pause Before You Play,” as well as the Ohio Lottery’s “Not for Kids” campaign to deliver critical prevention messaging. This joint effort was strategically designed to reach families, educators, coaches, and administrators across Ohio during the 2024-2025 school year.

The partnership enables broad outreach to students through targeted social media campaigns, promoting essential resources like time management tools, media literacy education, and information about the risks and effects of gambling. Additional engagement strategies include promoting access to the “Game Quitters” program, offering a prevention pledge, and distributing surveys.

These efforts have achieved extensive reach:

- More than 357,000 athletes with nearly 3 million Ohio attendees at sporting events have been engaged across 1,500 schools statewide with millions of additional impressions generated through the OHSAA website.

A pilot survey conducted in the spring assessed youth gambling behaviors and it will be expanded statewide this fall, providing valuable insights to inform future prevention strategies.

The Prevention Fellowship

The Prevention Fellowship launched this year and is a year-long initiative aimed at expanding problem gambling prevention tools and resources across Ohio by engaging certified prevention professionals. The Problem Gambling Network of Ohio selected five Fellows from diverse community-based prevention agencies through targeted outreach to various organizations, including county ADAMHS Boards and health departments.

The Fellowship supports professional development, strengthens Ohio’s prevention workforce, and improves the quality of problem gambling prevention services.

Fellows collaborate in planning meetings to identify gaps in the field, transform ideas into actionable projects, and develop practical prevention initiatives focused on evidence-informed strategies, partnership development, and sustainable change.

Key objectives include improving prevention services, supporting professional growth, and identifying new tools for the field. The Fellows have held multiple collaborative meetings and conducted a statewide survey to gather feedback on critical gaps. Insights from this survey are guiding the development of two to four products to enhance prevention efforts statewide.

The Prevention Fellowship consisted of the following participants:

- Kristina Latta-Landefeld (Envision Partnerships, Butler County)
- Nora Larson (Recovery Resources, Cuyahoga County)
- Janet Thode (Maryhaven, Franklin County)
- Lauren Munk (CHC Addiction Services, Summit County)
- Mary Wolff (Talbert House, Hamilton County)

These dedicated participants exemplify strong leadership and commitment, positioning them to drive meaningful and lasting advancements in problem gambling prevention across Ohio.

Strategic Prevention Framework Training

Eight individuals completed the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) Training, an engaging, 15-hour workshop designed to deepen participants’ understanding of Ohio’s problem gambling service system through a comprehensive review of national, statewide, and local data. The training, in its second year, introduced the SPF, guiding participants to assess the nature and extent of problem gambling, explore risk and protective factors, and evaluate community resources and readiness to address these issues.

Throughout the workshop, emphasis was placed on building capacity by fostering collaboration with stakeholders and community sectors. Participants learned to identify specific problems of practice within their local context by analyzing data, comparing gambling prevention efforts with drug and alcohol prevention initiatives, and conducting resource and readiness assessments.

The training also equipped participants with strategies for effective advocacy within their organizations and communities to promote problem gambling prevention statewide.

Clinical Supervision Skills Series

To strengthen supervision competencies within Ohio's behavioral health workforce, the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio (PGNO) launched the Developing Clinical Supervision Skills Series, a five-part training designed for professionals overseeing clinical staff who provide counseling to individuals with a gambling disorder. This initiative was the first to offer supervision-specific continuing education hours endorsed by both the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board and the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board, with a specialized focus on gambling services.

The series provided participants with a comprehensive exploration of supervision responsibilities and best practices. Topics included the role of state licensing boards, local mental health authorities, and regulatory organizations in ensuring ethical service delivery, as well as the requirements for mandated and ethical violation reporting.

Over the course of the year, PGNO successfully delivered **all five training sessions**, engaging a total of **91 participants statewide**. The sessions covered ethical oversight, mandated reporting, cultural humility, staff supervision models, onboarding and hiring practices, and performance evaluation practices. Feedback from participants underscored the positive impact of the training, noting increased confidence in supervisory roles and stronger organizational support for gambling-related clinical services across Ohio. This series represents an important step toward building a system-wide competency in supervision practices for addressing problem gambling.

Gambling Disorder Case Presentation

PGNO hosted four no-cost, one-hour Gambling Disorder Case Presentation webinars. These quarterly sessions attracted **75 total professionals** interested in learning about gambling disorders and their treatment.

Each webinar focused on unique clinical perspectives and challenges, covering topics such as co-occurring

disorders involving severe mental health and substance use, the influence of external factors on problem gambling, client engagement strategies, and family counseling. The presentations provided valuable insights into gambling forms, impacts on individuals and communities, screening and assessment methods, and effective interventions.

Feedback surveys were utilized to assess knowledge gained, participant satisfaction, and the intended application of information in practice, supporting ongoing professional development in addressing gambling disorders.

Property Tours

Property tours, held during Problem Gambling Awareness Month each March with the coordination of the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio, foster collaboration among gambling operators, regulators, and community prevention and treatment providers through guided tours of Ohio's casino and racino facilities. This year, the program hosted **nine tours** across Ohio's 11 properties, engaging **171 participants**, an 8% increase from SFY24.

The tours provide in-depth exposure to gaming operations, responsible gambling compliance, and the Time Out Ohio program, alongside discussions that encourage direct interaction among stakeholders. Participants have included high-level executives, state legislators, regulatory representatives, clinical fellowship participants, and prevention and treatment providers.

This initiative has strengthened partnerships, enhanced understanding, improved referral processes, and expanded resource access within gambling venues. Educational materials, interactive sessions with compliance officers, and feedback surveys support ongoing learning and program improvement. Overall, the property tours promote shared knowledge and commitment to harm reduction strategies and industry best practices in Ohio.

Ohio Gambling Treatment Fellowship

The 10th cohort of the Ohio Gambling Treatment Fellowship completed the year-long program, with **five clinicians** participating in eight monthly sessions led by Problem Gambling Network of Ohio staff Katrina Arroyo and Jesse Woodrig. These sessions combined didactic learning, clinical supervision, and experiential activities

focused on best practices in gambling disorder treatment. Guided by insights from the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation-led focus group, the Fellowship offered a dynamic curriculum tailored to address current clinical and systemic challenges.

Throughout the year, Fellows engaged in key events such as the Ohio Problem Gambling Conference and a venue tour that provided valuable context for community-based services. The program culminated in a formal graduation ceremony on June 13, 2025, where each Fellow presented a comprehensive case study, demonstrating their advanced clinical skills and innovative contributions to the field of gambling treatment in Ohio.

The participating clinicians included:

- Allison Huss (Zepf Center, Toledo)
- Mandi Davis (Hopewell Health Centers, Jackson)
- Adam Armstrong, William Hassan, and Ashley Hughes (Recovery Resources, Cleveland)

Consultation Program

The Consultation Program provides tailored support to agencies and professionals across Ohio to strengthen prevention, intervention, and treatment for problem gambling. Through projects such as Agency Service Consultation, Community Readiness Assessment, Prevention Fellowship, Clinical Fellowship, and Statewide Campaign Support, the program offers expert guidance to improve effectiveness, build capacity, and ensure the sustainability of gambling disorder services statewide.

In SFY25, the centerpiece of this work was the Problem Gambling Service Consultation Project, which expanded its reach by partnering with 10 agencies, a **42 percent increase over the previous year**. More than 40 leaders and staff participated in the initiative, including chief executives, financial and operations officers, as well as directors of treatment, prevention, communications, and other managerial staff. The project supported these agencies in embedding gambling disorder services into their operations, culture, and communications, with an emphasis on staff training, process improvement, policy development, and outcome evaluation.

The agencies advanced through three phases of consultation. **Phase 1** included Maryhaven, Mental Health Services for Clark and Madison Counties, and Phoenix

Rising. These organizations concentrated on outreach expansion, staff development, adoption of screening tools, and the introduction of campus-based education.

In **Phase 2**, Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers, MetroHealth, Recovery Resources, and Recovery and Wellness Centers of Midwest Ohio focused their efforts on marketing strategies, integration of services into electronic health records, internal staff training, and broader county-wide prevention initiatives. Recovery and Wellness Centers of Midwest Ohio stood out by hosting its first in-person training for nearly **20 staff members**, enrolling a new team member in the Stages Training Series, and ensuring staff participation in the State Problem Gambling Conference.

The **third and final phase** involved CHC Addiction Services, Envision Partnerships, and Signature Health. These agencies worked on advancing staff training, building coalitions, expanding school-based education efforts, and scaling services. Signature Health demonstrated substantial growth, increasing from a single gambling clinician to **more than 20 specialists**. Meanwhile, Envision Partnerships successfully had **20 individuals** earn either a gambling endorsement or competency credential.

All 10 agencies concluded their work by presenting outcomes during a recorded virtual session on June 6, 2025. This session was shared with fellow participants, ORG, and PGNO staff, providing an opportunity for agencies to demonstrate progress, reflect on challenges and lessons learned, and showcase the integration of gambling disorder services into their organizational frameworks.

Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline

The Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline remained a vital support for thousands of individuals and families contending with the consequences of gambling in communities across the state. Available via phone and online chat, the Helpline **fielded 9,460 contacts**, peaking in March during Problem Gambling Awareness Month, a signal of increased engagement and outreach efforts.

Most help-seekers reached out for themselves, often driven by financial strain, family conflicts, or mental health concerns that stemmed from their gambling behavior. Most had grappled with their problems for less than a year, though there were many with multi-year histories.

Casino slots and sports betting, followed by daily fantasy sports and lottery games, were the most common activities prompting calls for help.

Demographically, the Helpline was used by adults across all age groups, with a **significant presence of callers aged 25 to 54**. The service saw a broad reach across Ohio's counties and cities, with the highest call volumes coming Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati.

Beyond connecting people to essential resources, the Helpline, along with warm transfers, have played a crucial role in bridging individuals directly to treatment providers. This service, available both during and outside standard business hours, ensured that immediate support was accessible. In total, **288 callers benefited from this direct linkage**, with gambling activities cited during transfers mirroring broader trends in slots and sports betting.

Help-seekers learned about the Helpline through a variety of sources: sports betting apps, lottery tickets, websites, and referrals from family, professionals, or media campaigns. Many callers needed more than just gambling support. They also requested financial counseling, mental health resources, legal advice, housing support, and crisis intervention, reflecting the deep and complex impact that gambling can have on a person's well-being.

Throughout the year, the Helpline adapted to meet the needs of a diverse population, offering both immediate guidance and longer-term connections to counseling and recovery supports. Its blend of responsiveness, statewide coverage, and multifaceted referral capabilities underscored its role as a cornerstone in Ohio's problem gambling support system.

Allocation Board-Supported Treatment

During SFY25, the statewide problem gambling allocations to the 50 behavioral health boards reported **55,963 completed gambling screens** and **792 individuals receiving clinical care**. These figures reflect a modest reduction from the previous reporting cycle; however, the decrease aligns with enhanced quality control and reporting standards introduced in the past fiscal year.

Board allocation dollars continue to play a central role in maintaining access for Ohioans to receive clinical care for gambling disorder. Treatment funding supports trained clinicians with gambling specific competency and for individuals to receive local clinical care at no cost.



Call Type of Gambling Activity	
Casino Slots	565
Sports	421
Fantasy	302
Casino Tables	258
Lottery Scratch-offs	240
Lottery Games	167
Internet Gaming	148
Cards/Dice	42
Keno	22
Sweepstakes/Skilled Games	17
Horse Race Betting	16
Pull Tabs	15
VLTs	14
Other	12
Horse Race Slots	8
Stocks	8
Bingo	7

Self-Reported Age	
1-17	10
18-20	36
21-24	192
25-34	369
35-44	249
45-54	183
55-64	159
65+	172

Calls by County	
Cuyahoga	634
Franklin	388
Hamilton	281
Montgomery	156
Summit	152
Lucas	129
Butler	90
Mahoning	75
Stark	61
Lorain	49
Clark	48
Trumbull	48
Warren	43
Lake	39
Licking	35
Portage	34
Clermont	32
Delaware	31
Medina	31
Fairfield	30

Year	SFY20	SFY21	SFY22	SFY23	SFY24	SFY25
Calls	6,047	6,301	5,706	9,448	9,724	9,460
Chats	386	601	715	1,009	538	361

Community Ambassador Project

The Community Ambassador Project is scheduled to launch in SFY26. This initiative will establish a **speaker's bureau** composed of individuals with lived experience and professionals in prevention and treatment, all trained to speak publicly about Gambling Disorder.

Participants will receive stipends to support their time and travel as they engage with media, community leaders, and elected officials. During SFY25, PGNO laid essential groundwork by developing a recruitment framework, initiating partnerships to identify potential speakers, and drafting a comprehensive training curriculum focused on media engagement and storytelling.

ORG provided **60 scholarships** for prevention and treatment professionals to attend the 2025 National Conference on Gambling Addiction and Responsible Gambling. Additionally, seven individuals in long-term recovery received scholarships to ensure their participation. With foundational elements in place, the Community Ambassador Project is positioned for a strong and impactful rollout in SFY26.

Community Readiness Assessment Narrative

The Community Planning Framework Learning Communities project is designed to strengthen Ohio communities' ability to respond effectively to problem gambling by using the evidence-based Tri-Ethnic Community Readiness Assessment (CRA) model. Through this structured approach, participating agencies engage eight to 10 key stakeholders to measure local awareness, capacity, and readiness across nine defined stages, ranging from "No Awareness" to "Professionalization." The results of this process allow agencies to identify readiness gaps, clarify a problem of practice, and implement prevention strategies that are targeted and responsive to community needs. Ultimately, the project builds foundational capacity for long-term strategic planning, workforce development, and deeper community impact.

PGNO identified **five community prevention agencies** to participate in the first year of what is envisioned as a two-year initiative. Each agency received a mini-grant to support their implementation work. The Community Readiness Assessments and accompanying strategic planning will be operating in SFY26.

The project's objectives include guiding each agency through completion of the CRA process by December 2025, including interviews with at least eight stakeholders per community, full scoring, and comprehensive analysis. Additional objectives include facilitating bi-monthly, in-person Learning Community sessions to foster peer exchange and deliver technical training, while also conducting alternating bi-monthly check-ins with PGNO for individualized consultation and ongoing technical support. Agencies are expected to use their assessment results to identify two to three key readiness gaps or strengths that will inform prevention strategy design. They will prepare formal Readiness Summary Reports, which will also lay the groundwork for the second year of the initiative, when the focus will shift toward strategic planning and broader implementation.

Initial progress was made in SFY25, with all five participating agencies: **Envision Partnerships, Lorain UMADAOP, Recovery and Wellness Centers of Midwest Ohio, Recovery Resources, and Summit County Community Partnerships**, selecting project teams of at least four members each.

PGNO conducted a full orientation session for these teams, introduced the CRA model, and participated in the agencies' internal planning meetings held in June 2025. Stakeholder interviews were scheduled to be completed and scored in September 2025, after which each agency will begin its analysis and development of Readiness Summary Reports. Meanwhile, the project's Learning Community training sessions, which launched in mid-2025, are ongoing and providing participating agencies with opportunities for peer learning, technical assistance, and shared problem-solving.

This first year of the Community Readiness Assessment initiative established a strong foundation for the second project year, which will focus on advancing from assessment into comprehensive strategic planning, with the goal of ultimately expanding the reach and effectiveness of problem gambling prevention across these five Ohio communities.

Agency Spotlight: Zepf Center

This past year has been one of growth, innovation, and impact for the Zepf Center's Gambling Services team. From strengthening treatment supports to expanding prevention efforts and community partnerships, the program continued to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families across Northwest Ohio.

Prevention and Outreach

- Completed more than 3,100 Brief Biosocial Gambling Screens with nearly 10% showing possible gambling risk.
- Engaged the community through more than 30 outreach events at campuses, sporting venues and health fairs.
- Delivered more than 15 professional trainings and presentations at state and national conferences.

Treatment Services

- Conducted 582 South Oaks Gambling Screens with one-third indicating likely concerns.
- Maintained active caseloads with individual therapy and consistent group sessions offered in-person and via telehealth.



Highlights

- Hosted the inaugural Problem Gambling Awareness Month Spirit Week in March, engaging students, providers, and community members in conversations about financial literacy and gambling risks.
- Partnered with the University of Toledo, Bowling Green State University, and local sports organizations to expand awareness efforts.

Looking ahead, the Zepf Center Gambling Services team is committed to building on the successes of the past year. Through continued investment in high-quality treatment, innovative prevention initiatives, and the power of community partnerships, Zepf remains a leader in the effort to promote responsible gambling, provide compassionate care, and reduce the harms associated with gambling harms in Northwest Ohio.

2025 National Conference on Gambling Addiction and Responsible Gambling

The 2025 National Conference on Gambling Addiction and Responsible Gambling, hosted by the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), took place July 16-18, 2025, at the Hyatt Regency in Columbus, Ohio. The event attracted **more than 700 attendees** from across the nation and around the world, representing a diverse range of disciplines, including leaders in treatment, research, advocacy, policymaking, prevention, the gambling industry, and individuals in recovery.

Conference breakout sessions covered a broad spectrum of topics, including findings from the National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Experiences (NGAGE 3.0), the growing intersections of cryptocurrencies and gambling, as well as significant advances in treatment approaches for gambling-related problems. The conference provided a unique platform for impactful dialogue, innovation, and the sharing of best practices in responsible and problem gambling work.

At the 2025 National Conference on Gambling Addiction and Responsible Gambling Awards Ceremony, ORG and PGNO received significant national honors for their work in responsible and problem gambling prevention, education,

and advocacy. Ohio stood out by being recognized in five major award categories:

Service Award: Susan Diamond, Responsible Gambling Program Manager with the Ohio Lottery, was recognized for her outstanding contributions.

Jim Wuelfing Award for Prevention: Claire Spada, Director of Workforce Development at the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio, was honored for leadership in problem gambling prevention.

Don Hulén Award for Advocacy and Awareness: Megan Poliquin, LPCC-S, LICDC-GAMB, of the Zepf Center, was acknowledged for her advocacy and awareness initiatives.

People’s Choice Award (Corporate): Ohio for Responsible Gambling’s “More Than a Bet” campaign was awarded as the top corporate campaign, highlighting its innovative approach to raising awareness and preventing harassment of college athletes related to sports betting.

Media Award: The Ohio Newsroom, with a statewide story about the Ohio Gambling Telehealth Network (reported by Erin Gottsacker), received the Media Award, acknowledging the awareness and support it brought to those struggling with gambling addiction in the state.

These awards not only reflect Ohio’s innovative and impactful prevention work but also recognize the achievements of individual leaders and collaborative campaigns making a difference in the lives of Ohioans and advancing responsible gambling nationwide.

At the 2025 National Problem Gambling Conference, Ohio was exceptionally well-represented, with **Ohioans delivering 16 presentations** that highlighted leading-edge research, prevention strategies, and treatment innovations. Notable Ohio presenters included Natalie Alexander, August Browning, Michael Buzzelli, Heather Chapman, Cindy Chizewick, Nick Fraunfelner, Nan Franks, Kelly Garza, Jennifer Grant Weinandy, Allison Huss, Kristina Latta Landefeld, Derek Longmeier, Caitlin Phillips, Megan Poliquin, Aubrey Price, and Claire Spada. Their expertise and leadership further underscored Ohio’s role as a national leader in problem gambling prevention and responsible gambling efforts.

2025 Ohio Problem Gambling Conference

The 2025 Ohio Problem Gambling Conference, held January 29-30 at the Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center, brought together the DBH Office of Community and Family Resiliency staff alongside national experts, state leaders, and local innovators representing problem gambling prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery, research, administration, and responsible gambling. PGNO saw robust attendance from professionals in prevention, treatment, recovery, operations, regulation, as well as broader community members, including participants from both within and outside of Ohio.

With **325 attendees**, the conference welcomed **25 more participants than last year’s in-person event**. Achieving this increase despite hotel construction, date changes, and new staff highlights the ongoing importance and resiliency of the conference for Ohio’s problem gambling community.



2025 Ohio Problem Gambling Conference Award of Excellence

The second Ohio Problem Gambling Awards of Excellence was announced by PGNO at the 22nd Ohio Problem Gambling Conference. These awards recognized two pioneers to the problem gambling field. This year's recipients included:

Karen Russo: Karen Russo's journey in the field of responsible gambling began in 2011 at the National Conference on Problem Gambling in Boston — an experience that became the catalyst for the formation of Ohio for Responsible Gambling. A true pioneer, she launched the Problem Gambling Addiction pilot with the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court and led the branding of Ohio's Voluntary Exclusion Program, Time Out Ohio. Throughout her career, she has served as a trainer, mentor, advocate, and role model, leaving a lasting imprint on the field. Even in retirement, she continues to influence the industry as an independent assessor and consultant.

Lou Weigele: With nearly 30 years of experience in the field, Louis Weigele has been a steadfast advocate for advancing problem gambling services and education. As a faculty member at Case Western Reserve University, he educates future social workers and counselors on the complexities of gambling addiction. A member of the inaugural Clinical Fellowship and Advanced Fellowship cohorts, Louis played a key role in the early support and development of the Ohio Council on Problem Gambling — now known as the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio.

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead to the coming year, our work in problem gambling will continue to center on innovation, measurable progress, and meaningful outcomes. By further integrating

problem gambling within Ohio's broader behavioral health systems and by collaborating closely with local behavioral health boards and university partners, we will refine our metrics to capture both reach and impact, strengthening our ability to meet the evolving needs of those we serve. Our priorities include expanding access to care while demonstrating clear data-driven improvements in wellness, resilience and recovery, ensuring that every step is intentional and accountable. Key initiatives include the Ohio Problem Gambling Innovation and Excellence Grant Program, executing and analyzing the Ohio Problem Gambling Stakeholder Survey, revitalizing the Problem Gambling Advisory Board, and advancing a new three-year strategic plan. We will also continue to invest in grassroots and academic partnerships to enhance outreach, research, and education efforts in high-impact communities across Ohio.

We will further expand access to high-quality problem gambling treatment, including the use of telehealth to reach individuals in underserved areas. Additionally, we will explore ways to enhance and utilize Ohio's Problem Gambling Helpline data more effectively to inform outreach, treatment connections, and system improvements. Problem gambling prevention will also be incorporated into our Boards of Excellence in Prevention initiative, aligning with Ohio's broader behavioral health and wellness priorities.

Together our progress over the past year has laid a strong foundation for the work ahead, demonstrating what is possible when collaboration, accountability, and compassion guide our efforts. Building on the shared momentum, we remain steadfast in our commitment to prevent problem gambling, expand access to care, strengthen recovery supports, and ensure that every initiative continues to reflect the dedication of Ohio's behavioral health community to lasting positive change.



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Behavioral Health**

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Mike DeWine, Governor | Tia Marcel Moretti, DBH Interim Director

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